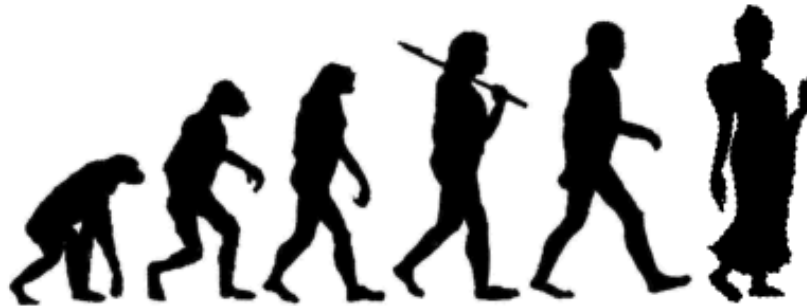


The Next Evolution is The Evolution of Consciousness



From Self to Non-Self

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The normal human being is not at the highest evolutionary level. This is why there is so much crime, war and mental sickness prevalent in the world today. The Buddhists believe that, individuals do evolve beyond this common level from time to time, and this has occurred many times in the past. Buddhists believe that the teaching of the Buddha is a description of the path of evolution of the human being. They also believe that the Buddha represents that fully evolved state, and his perfected disciples were also fully evolved individuals. They were those who had transcended the normal consciousness and attained to a Supernormal or Divine consciousness. It is an evolution from **existence to experience; from self to no self.**

Buddhists also believe that it is this transcendence that all religions describe as union with God. Buddhists call it “Awakening from the Dream of Existence.” The normal consciousness is aware of a “Self existing in the World;” while the Supernormal consciousness is aware of the mental process that creates this “world” and the “self” in it, through the process of perception. By becoming aware of the process of perception, the reality of the “world” and the “self” is lost. This is the awakening from the dream of existence. Just as a magician looking at a magic show sees no magic in it, the one who has Awakened from the dream of Existence sees no reality in what has been perceived. He has seen how the process of perception creates the world and all the objects in it, including oneself, and therefore he sees nothing real about what is seen to exist, either subjective or objective. This is not a fact unknown to modern psychologists or modern philosophers, but they do not normally take it seriously, because this fact looks so unreal in ordinary everyday life. The reason for this is that the normal human being, although quite rational, is also dominated by blind emotions that tell them that they do really exist.

This transcendence of the normal human consciousness can be viewed as the culmination of the evolutionary process, spoken of by Charles Darwin. He pointed out that evolution takes place due to what he called natural selection, which consisted of a natural “struggle for existence” and the “survival of the fittest.” In reality, however, no individual survived, only the species continued.

In order to understand this fully it is necessary to know how life began on earth. Life began when a special kind of molecule came into being, either from outer space, or from the Earth itself. This molecule had a special property. It could absorb atoms from its surroundings and produce molecules of its own kind. Every molecule thus formed had to break down, because everything that is integrated due the presence of the necessary conditions, is also subject to disintegration when the necessary conditions are absent. This is the natural law of determinism. Thus everything that is dependent on conditions is unstable.

The integration of molecules need energy, which is obtained from the sun. In the same way disintegration releases energy. It was the energy released by this breaking down that was used to build a new molecule. So the struggle continued but no individual survived. This means, only a struggle to exist continues, but no individual continues to exist. In other words this struggle is a failure. The continuity of this futile struggle is only a continuity of suffering?

Every atom, every molecule, every thought and every emotion is in a continuous process of coming and going. Existence is a static concept, though life is a dynamic process of change, like the water in a river that is changing all the time. It is not the same river that one sees the next moment. This is why Heraclitus of Ephesus said, “one cannot enter the same river twice.” In a similar way, the baby that is born is not the girl or boy that gets married; similarly the old person that dies is not the girl or boy who got married. A person or individual is not a static entity,

but a dynamic process of change like a wave in the ocean. Does a wave really exist? Does a changing process really exist? Is it only when the change is found to be slow that we tend to form the static concept – existence? If so, do we, you and I, really exist? “Existence is an illusion,” or more appropriately a “delusion.” This means, life is not an existence but a process of change.

If we can accept this, we will be immortal, because if we do not exist, how can we grow old or die? This immortality is not eternal life. It is freedom from the “delusion of existence.” This is the immortality shown by the Buddha, which can be gained through the evolution of consciousness. When the human consciousness has evolved, to the level where this truth has been fully comprehended, the struggle for existence stops, but this can happen only in the absence of interfering blind emotions, This is why Buddhist meditation is of two types: first freeing the mind of emotions (samatha), and then developing the thinking faculty that helps in understanding (vipassana).

"This process called life, which started as an unusual molecule that was able to absorb atoms from its surroundings and create molecules of its own kind, made a terrible mistake quite unconsciously. When, through the evolutionary process, the human animal became conscious, and able to think rationally, unhindered by emotions, he became aware of the mistake of struggling to exist. He realized that it was only a struggle to become permanent in an impermanent world. It was a futile struggle where only disappointment and frustration persisted. Becoming aware of this fact, the wise human animal can stop the futile struggle, and thereby stop not only the process of evolution itself, but also all sufferings connected with illusory existence."

The Humanistic Savior

This is why the Buddhist does not think, “the saviour of the world is the Creator of the world.” The Creator cannot be a saviour because he is the Creator of suffering. The true saviour can only be a human being who can free himself from this suffering by transcending the normal human consciousness, which is dreaming that a “self” exists in a world that exists.” This saviour awakens from this “dream of existence,” and then teaches others to awaken from this terrible nightmare, “the dream of life and death.” The all knowing, all powerful, all good “God” is not an unknown Creator, but a known human being who has transcended all human weaknesses. Such an individual is the Buddha, and He is therefore the true God of the Buddhists. He is called “God-become” (brahma bhuto).

This description of the Buddha helps one understand that Buddhism is neither theistic nor atheistic. It is humanistic because this concept of God is a humanistic concept of God. It recognises the potential divinity of the human being. It is through the process of evolution that the human being evolves to the level of God. This is the humanistic way of union with God, which all religions speak of in their own way. God is understood in Buddhist thinking to be only the human concept of perfection. God is the ideal of perfection that human beings conceive, and struggle to realize through the practice of religion. When a human being does realize this ideal, he is called an Awake One, a Buddha. When this occurs, the process of evolution stops, because the futile struggle to exist stops, and one has “Awakened” from the “dream of existence.” The essence of this “God” is not “existence,” as in the case of the theistic God; the essence of this God is “non-existence.” This God does not exist, even when others see Him as an existing person. This is the anthropomorphic God of the Buddhist.

Tranquillity

The method of entering a state of tranquillity of the mind through meditation was known to the Indian yogis even before the Buddha. There were eight deep levels of tranquillity that the yogis had reached during the time of the Buddha. The Buddha went only one step further and temporarily stopped all activities of the mind by entering a state of quiescence which was similar to hibernation. This state was called *sañña vedayita nirodha*, which means, “cessation of sensation and feeling.” It was when rising from this state that the Buddha “awakened from the dream of existence.”

These levels of deep tranquillity were practiced, in order to rest the mind temporarily, not to remain in them permanently. This temporary tranquillity was not Nirvana. It was only a means to Nirvana. Nirvana is a state of inner tranquillity that could never be disturbed under any circumstance, even in the face of death. It is a state of tranquillity that lasts throughout the normal life. This imperturbable serenity of mind is gained by awakening from the dream of existence and death. It is immortality through freedom from the “delusion of existence.”

In order to achieve this, supernormal and extremely high level of development, called Nirvana, which

is extremely rare in the world, both ancient and modern, one has to give up the experience of existence of a “self” in the world. It is the “self-consciousness” that stood as an obstacle to imperturbability. This “self-consciousness” becomes a problem even when we try to control our impulses, because we tend to identify with our emotions and personalize them, and thereby become unable to let-go of what is a part of oneself. It is only when one is able to “awaken from the dream of existence” that the self-consciousness disappears. This was the special attainment of the Buddha, by which he went beyond the other yogis. He did this by attaining to the ending of all mental activity and returning again to the normal state. In doing so, he saw how the mind created the “world” and the “self” in it. He also saw how the “self” gets involved with the “world” in emotional relationships, and how all the painful experiences result, including meeting the unpleasant, parting from the pleasant, frustration, aging, disease, death, and the grief, lamentation, pain, depression, and exhaustion that follows. This attainment is rising above the normal to the supernormal state, which is freedom from all suffering.

This supernormal state is what we call the Evolution of Consciousness

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